



MONTHLY REPORT MARCH 2020

Commercial and Recreational Fisheries

- March got off to a good start, with a Shellfish Department initiative to allow dragging of the inner harbor portion of the federal channel, offering great opportunities for draggers to make money and ensuring all shellfish would be removed prior to dredging.
- Dragging the channel initiative:
 - We worked with boat owners to ensure compliance with Shellfish Policy and Regulations and Harbormaster requirements.
 - We put additional buoys in channel to mark the 25-foot grant buffer.
 - On March 5, it was opened up for dragging oysters. The boat effort lasted one day. No one continued because the yield for effort was so low...one bushel of oysters for hours of dragging.
 - On March 12, we opened this area up for dragging quahogs. This proved lucrative and attracted draggers to the area.
- However, mid-month, the spread of COVID-19 with ensuing regulations closing restaurants except for takeout and stay-at-home orders caused the market for shellfish to collapse. No one could sell the shellfish they harvested.
- A few local initiatives came forth, and the department worked closely with all entities to make sure they were successful. Some markets returned as well, moving small amounts.
- Although shellfishermen are struggling, there are some bright spots because these initiatives are putting some money in their pockets—from SPAT's buying shellfish to donate to local food pantries to Holbrook Oyster buying clams to supply home delivery orders to the department's buying channel quahogs for its propagation efforts.
- The department began a program to relay quahogs from the channel to other harbor areas to keep shellfishermen working during the COVID-19 market crash and propagate Chipman's Cove and the Indian Neck recreational only area with harvestable quahogs. By the end of the month, the department had purchased 71.5 bushels of quahogs from draggers, resulting in \$2,220.00 in local shellfishermen's pockets. This includes a donation of ten bushels that a shellfisherman was not able to sell.
- The Herring River opened on March 17, however due to COVID-19 shutting down markets it was sparsely attended. No more than two-three shellfishermen have been observed there at a time since it opened.
- Our conservative estimate of commercial catches is more than 200 bushels of oysters, 100 bushels of quahogs, 70 bushels of blood clams and 90 bushels of bay scallops.
- We continued holding orientations for first-time commercial permit holders.
- We held meetings with two grant holders about transfers and helped three others with paperwork for a total of seven grant transfers.
- Toward the end of the month, recreational shellfishing increased dramatically for this time of year, and we sold many new annual permits.
- We estimate that more than six bushels of quahogs and more than fifteen bushels of oysters were harvested in the recreational fishery.

Enforcement

- We issued a second seed violation to a commercial shellfisherman, a \$150 ticket.
- We have been having problems with recreational permit holders fishing in the Burton Baker Beach closed area and with taking of oyster seed. We issued a Crier to all current permit holders educating them about these regulations including a map of the closed area and a reminder that the Shellfish Dept. is practicing social distancing when inspecting catches. Each week, we send that Crier out to all newly permitted individuals as well.
- We found two people without permits shellfishing at Indian Neck. We confiscated their catch, explained how to get a shellfish permit and made them leave the area.

State and Town Relations

- The Town received its MEPA certificate for continuing our century-long cultching operations (placing sea clam shells around the harbor to attract juvenile oysters). Great progress; we are in the final permitting stages now. Many thanks to Hillary Lemos for working long and hard on this.
- Shellfish Constable Nancy Civetta worked with Mass. Division of Marine Fisheries on allowing grant oysters to be resubmerged, our quahog relay initiative and extending bay scallop season.
- Civetta attended three Selectboard meetings: one to set opening and closing of Herring River, one for budget approval and one with seven grant transfers.
- The Shellfish Advisory Board meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19 closing Town buildings.
- Civetta attended the Cape Cod Commission public hearing about the Herring River Restoration Project and gave testimony and submitted comments supporting it.
- Civetta attended a Finance Committee meeting where the Shellfish Dept. budget was approved.
- Civetta attended a Dredging Task Force meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and prepared detailed information and letters for the Mass. Dredging Program application and a letter for the ACOE regarding the Chipman's Cove portion of the dredging project.
- Civetta attended a mandatory orientation for AmeriCorps Individual Placement applicants.
- Civetta met with Barbara Boone of the Chequessett Yacht and Country Club about shellfishermen accessing the Herring River there. She is amenable; Civetta will draw up criteria.
- SAB Chair Dave Seitler worked with the Center for Coastal Studies to retrieve lost aquaculture gear from the channel. CCS conducted a sonar experiment inside Indian Neck breakwater.

Propagation

- Assistant Constable for Propagation John Mankevetch led efforts on our propagation bed. We got all our pitted oyster bags tied down, began breaking down seed oysters into lower density bags and moved seed oysters from onion bags back into grow bags.
- We distributed approximately 100,000 predator resistant-sized seed oysters to Indian Neck commercial and recreational areas.
- The department submitted its cultching plan for the Herring River commercial harvest area to the National Park Service/Cape Cod National Service per our memorandum of agreement.
- Buoys were placed at Smalley's bar for cultching.
- We placed more seed oyster and clam orders.
- Bay Sails put our new motors on the cultch barge, and we are investigating how to sell old ones.
- AmeriCorps members are helping the department tag all its oyster grow bags and racks.

Education and Public Relations

- Mankevetch gave a group of students from Suffolk University a tour of our propagation bed and the Herring River and talked about shellfish and their importance to our marine environment. We thank SPAT for this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Civetta, Shellfish Constable